

Article

Melancholy, Narcissism and Hope in Truth

Catherine Pickstock

Faculty of Divinity and Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3AP, UK; cjp15@cam.ac.uk

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Abstract: The fate of a ‘correlational’ approach to truth, which defines contemporary epistemological theories of knowledge, is described as inescapable by Quentin Meillasoux. If Meillasoux is right, then we are far from being able to hope in truth, if we are to follow the philosopher, Andrea Bellantone’s identification of correlation with narcissism and melancholia in *La métaphysique possible*. In order to understand correlation as narcissism and melancholy, one needs to reconsider the ineluctability of a metaphysical perspective, which pivots around the ultimacy of both being or reality, and the disclosive power of mind. According to Bellantone, human existence is faced with the overwhelming, superabundant and inexhaustible circumstance of being and its multiplicity. In the face of this multiple donation, one cannot avoid offering a joyous response, an appropriate counter-gift. As to what this gift is to be, this depends upon one’s intuitive and interpretative understanding of the import of being as such. Although this question is unanswerable, one cannot avoid it. Even a single being presents a saturated presence to one: a stone does not disclose all of itself, or all of its infinitely ramifying connections with other entities. A metaphysical answer to reality, a certain ‘taking’ of the real, even though one must ceaselessly modify this taking, is unavoidable.

Keywords: correlation; melancholia; narcissism; Andrea Bellantone; Quentin Meillasoux; gift; French Spiritual Realism

The fate of a ‘correlational’ approach to truth, ‘the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’, which defines contemporary epistemological theories of knowledge, is described as inescapable by Quentin Meillasoux. If Meillasoux is right, then we are far from being able to hope in truth, if we are to follow Andrea Bellantone’s identification of correlation with narcissism and melancholia in *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012).¹

In order to understand correlation as narcissism and melancholy, one needs to reconsider the ineluctability of a metaphysical perspective, which pivots around the ultimacy of both being or reality, and the disclosive power of mind. According to Bellantone, human existence is faced with the overwhelming, superabundant and inexhaustible circumstance of being and its multiplicity.² In the face of this multiple donation, one cannot avoid offering a joyous response, an appropriate counter-gift. As to what this gift is to be, this depends upon one’s intuitive and interpretative understanding of the import of being as such. Although this question is unanswerable, one cannot avoid it. Even a single being presents a saturated presence to one: a stone does not disclose all of itself, or all of its infinitely ramifying connections with other entities. A metaphysical answer to reality, a certain ‘taking’ of the real, even though one must ceaselessly modify this taking, is unavoidable.

¹ Andrea Bellantone, *La métaphysique possible: Philosophies de l’esprit et modernité* (Bellantone 2012). Quentin Meillasoux, Meillasoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans R. Brassier (Meillasoux 2008, p. 5).

² Bellantone, *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, pp. 223–58).

This essay builds upon Meillasoux's critique, and Bellantone's vision of the truth of the spirit as a response to the melancholy of correlation, to propose a version of realism orientated around human creative production and spirit, rather than as trapped within the contrived gap between subject and object. My approach will involve attention to Bellantone's recent work, following in the French Spiritual Realist tradition of Maine de Biran and Félix Ravaisson. In doing this, I seek to clarify the extra-logical truth of reality, the truth of creativity, of natural process, of time and of hope, opening the way to thinking of truth in terms of poetic and liturgical 'addition', rather than as an exactness of representation which is doomed to failure.

This is not just a matter of an unavoidable but melancholic tilting towards speculation, as for Immanuel Kant, which a practically and scientifically orientated theoretical truth may ignore. It is rather the case that any human language, human culture, or individual existential choice must make a metaphysical wager. One may think that one is running for the bus, because one has to get to the station to catch a train; but really one is repeating and reinforcing a collective and individual existential choice whenever one does so. Faced with the mysteriously inexhaustible *possibility* of the real, this choice has both to affirm the ultimate reality of this open potential, and to make decisions within this openness, which it cannot take to be merely ungrounded wagers, but decisions as to the import of this openness itself. In such a context, to decide that being is nothingness, an empty abyss, as for G. W. F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger, would be a despairing gesture, running counter to the necessary positivity of human existence.

If one tries to avoid metaphysics, then, according to the philosopher, Andrea Bellantone, one must confine oneself within a narcissistic circle.³ One must arbitrarily reduce reality to that which is disclosed to one, within certain bounds, in such a way that knowledge will be confined to appearances, and one cannot be certain that these appearances convey to one the ultimate reality of things. This approach is true of empiricism, he argues, for which all that one can know is supposedly clear sensory evidence. It is true for idealism, in turn; all that one can know is what the mind can construct or deduce, again with complete clarity. It is unsurprising that the combination of these two stances, in the form of Kantian transcendental idealism, is for Bellantone, the paradigm of narcissistic and melancholic self-enclosure. For Kant, the *a priori* categories of one's understanding perfectly correlate with, and refer to the *a posteriori* deliverances of the senses, enclosing one within a perfect finite circle.⁴

What can one know, within this finite circle? Only one's own reflection in the pool of a confined reality. Melancholia ensues, because one is cut free from the plenitude of real being, for which one mournfully longs. The confined being of reflection, which one possesses, might as well not exist. To be or not to be; that is the negatively dialectical question, as for the Prince of all melancholics, Hamlet of Denmark.

Truth in this context is ascertainable, but so trivial that it evaporates. It is either exhausted by the factuality of things, or their comprehensibility by a human mind, or both at once. It does not matter: deflation eventuates in all three instances. If one tries to locate truth exhaustively within things, as in the writings of Graham Harman and Tristan Garcia, the same game resumes: one has to regard things as making quasi-subjective operations, and in consequence, truth becomes diversified and localized. But the disclosure of one thing to another, in such and such a way, is circumstantial. Truth is universal, or it is nothing: local illuminations reduce to local events and instances. If being as such shines with a further light, illumination is irreducible as a surplus event that is more than being, more than reality: a revelation of the real which reveals the real to be revelatory. Local epiphanies can participate in this disclosure; indeed, their minor revelations reveal an overall revealing, an Heideggerean undisclosure or a Platonic recollection. If not, then their revealings undo themselves as additional facts, or random modes of relating to other facts.

³ *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, pp. 53–87).

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Gary Hatfield tr (Kant 1997).

It seems in consequence that certainty and proof are the enemies of truth. In finite life, when a truth becomes certain, it fades back blankly into being, and so into banality. Since it says *fact*, merely what is, it no longer says anything on its own account, as truth. In seeking to speak, to be *logos*, it ceases to speak truth, but evaporates into circumstance. As Meillassoux indicates, the correlational confinement of modern thought ignores truth, though the truth which he locates beyond this is the anti-truth of nihilism. By contrast, for Bellantone, the only truth is metaphysical truth.⁵ One side of this truth is the acknowledgment of the reality of a vast and infinite unknown that is in excess of one. But the reverse face of this truth is the acknowledgment itself, which cannot be passive, but is an active response. For reality is not there before one in a quiescent form, like a silent blank stillness; rather, it arrives intrusively, like rain, as a multiple gift which one receives with gratitude and wonder, and intermittently with horror and despair, when too much rain causes terrible floods. To receive being is to construe it, to wonder about, and to search for its ultimate sources. One's thinking response to existence attempts to repeat and to match or align with its gift, to imitate and to advance it, and through this recognition, somewhat to enter into its mysteries.

As one of the key influences upon Bellantone, the French philosopher of the later nineteenth century, Félix Ravaisson, expressed it, human cultural existence and philosophy echo the mystery at the heart of ancient religion: the attempt to enter into the dark hidden night-time abode of Pluto, whence arise the stars and all other mysteries of existence. This underworld is secretly not merely dark, but, as for Virgil, lit by another, unknown sun, and other, unknown stars.⁶ This initiatory movement is perpetuated in sacrifice, when one seeks to join the divine by imitating its gestures of offering and of self-offering. For Ravaisson, it was Christianity that perpetuated and consummated this pagan understanding.⁷

For the tradition of French 'spiritual realism', which Ravaisson re-founded, following Maine de Biran, and within which Bellantone's work can be situated, human thought is a kind of initiation and sacrifice. As initiation and sacrifice, thoughts attain to truth, or align with it.

In this notion of sacrificial aligning, one begins to see a way beyond correlational confinement. For it is not that there is a thought which might or might not correlate with the real, and so be a thought or not. Rather, thinking occasions the partial event of truth's realization. If thinking is false, it is false not by virtue of failing to correspond, but by failure to be thinking, and so further to realize the real, or to make the right additions, as for Rowan Williams. If there is such a thing as truth, one can suggest that mind as spirit is disclosive and fulfilling of being. So the moon remotely evokes Ravaisson's hidden, underground sun of Hades. Any kinship between the human spirit and reality would seem to imply that reality, from its apparently dark emergence, is not other from spirit. One's disclosure of ultimate spirit or the divine, as thinking beings, implies that this disclosure is atavistic and etiologically. The surplus abundance of being, its hidden potency, is at one with the continuously supplementary actuality of manifestation and awareness. Our apparently redundant joy, and the superfluity of consciousness, are, for such an outlook, the goal which accounts for why anything exists.

To understand why this different recent approach to truth might be conceivable, it is salutary to consider the significance of the modern turn to the subject in philosophy. This subjective turn has resulted in an obsession with epistemology, in such a way that metaphysical and ontological ambitions have been forgotten. The subject has in effect been defined as commanding a knowable landscape: the truth that is 'apparent to the subject', or that the subject may construct out of the pre-given norms of her consciousness. For such a view, as for Kant, the subject remains part of unknown reality, metaphysically out of bounds, and is 'apperceived' as the transcendental precondition for theoretically secure apprehension. To the degree that Descartes focused on pre-given rational truths, and on human

⁵ *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, pp. 17–51).

⁶ Félix Ravaisson, 'Mysteries: Fragment of a Study of the History of Religions', *Selected Essays*. Mark Sinclair tr (Ravaisson 2016d, pp. 243–51).

⁷ (Ravaisson 2016e), 'Metaphysics and Morals', *Selected Essays*, pp. 279–93.

thought rather than human action and interactions with other realities, one can include Descartes within this purview. However, Descartes's account of one's direct perception of one's subjective essence in the *cogito* should alert one to the limits of this reading of his outlook.

There is an alternative construal of the turn to the subject, and of interpreting Descartes, suggested by Ravaissou, and more recently by Bellantone. For this construal, the turn is not a shift from ontology to epistemology, but an affirmation of the metaphysical. At this point, it is pertinent to recall that philosophy, for the pre-Socratics, sought to reduce Being to something physically comprehensible, in terms of the permutations of a dominant element, such as water, or abstractly comprehensible like number, as for the Pythagoreans.⁸ For philosophy to be more than physics or mathematics, for it to become metaphysics, as for Plato and Aristotle, Socrates had to inaugurate a turn to the subject, for all that one can authentically know is oneself, or at least this self-knowledge must be included in any authentic understanding. This betokened something quite unlike the inauguration of epistemology, or of truth as the correlated. Rather, since in oneself, and in the city, one feels the lure of beauty and goodness, in response to the cosmos, in a new philosophical way, the 'secularity' of the physicists was to be abandoned, in favor of a return to the mysteries of the hidden depths evoked by myth. In recognizing that one is a cave-dweller, embracing its shadowy darkness, one will turn around to face the hidden, deeper Egyptian and Saturnian Sun of the Good.

This Socratic turn to the subject did not involve a 'spatial' focus on the interval or correlation between given subject and given object. Rather, the Socratic subject was a biographical self, located within time, and in the course of time, encountered things which, according to Plato, permitted a 'recollection' of the eternal archetypes of truth, under the light of the Sun of the Good. For such a philosophy, the mark of truth is not the lapidary fact of things, but their inherent excellence. This excellence shines out dimly through finite things as beauty, which invokes one's desire for their goodness.⁹ The moment of truth is, in this axiological triad, the moment when the highest realities are expressed in perfected beauty, in the Forms, or in the Mind of God, and by participation in the human mind, in one's thinking, insofar as it is thinking.

As Ravaissou emphasized in *Essai sur la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, one can understand Aristotle as shifting the focus from Form towards mind, or towards the dynamism of *spirit*. He read Aristotelian *morphē* or form, following Schelling, in terms of its being a lower degree of *psyche*, or soul, and soul in terms of a lower degree of actively aware soul, or *nous* which is mind. A kind of qualified vitalism and pan-psychism resulted from this emphasis.¹⁰ Everything that exists is propelled in ascending analogical degrees, through but away from matter, towards a realization of the mental. Matter and Form are opposites, but united as individual substance, which possesses a self-standing life, and so exceeds essential form as substantiated form.¹¹ Being is a paradoxical *genus* that is not a *genus*; this is because being cannot be divided, but can be individuated by substances, and yet in every substance, it is wholly present. Every substance, as living, is in motion, and motion is a paradoxical coincidence of potential and activity, as otherwise it could not move, but would rather trail through a series of discrete instances. But what moves motion is the unmoved and actualized moving of eternal and transcendent mind, beyond the cosmic. For Aristotle, this is the very process of truth, reality as a process of truth-realization, of becoming mental.

For Ravaissou, though, the Neoplatonists had supplemented Aristotle via an account of how the eternally actual divine mind initially generates reality through a process of emanation.¹² For this reason, potential, though real, cannot be given equal weight with action, though one notes that, for the

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Beginning of Philosophy*. Rod Coltman tr (Gadamer 2016).

⁹ *Phaedrus*, 249d-e.

¹⁰ Ravaissou, 'Essay on Stoicism', *Selected Essays* (Ravaissou 2016c, pp. 85–143); *Essai sur la "Métaphysique" d'Aristote* [1837–1845] (Ravaissou and Caron-Parte 2007).

¹¹ Bellantone, *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, pp. 261–326).

¹² Ravaissou, 'Metaphysics and Morals', p. 286; *Essai sur la "Métaphysique" d'Aristote* (Ravaissou and Caron-Parte 2007, pp. 634–752).

Neoplatonists, the ultimate One exceeds the contrast of potential with action, as of rest with motion. In placing potential before, and in excess of the actual, Bellantone is not consistent with Aristotle, nor with Ravaissan, nor with Neoplatonism. He invokes Nicholas of Cusa's pure *possest* or *posse ipsum*, although for Cusa, this power *is* the infinite power of infinitely realized actuality, which paradoxically remains, even in its infinite realization.¹⁴ This may suggest a note of lingering phenomenological and immanentist bias in Bellantone's work, but he nonetheless embraces the paradoxical basis of the Neoplatonic generation of being: even the replete and actual proves to be, as replete and actual, potentially *more* than itself.¹⁵ Translated into Christian terms by Origen, this means that the mark of the all-sufficient uncreatedness of God is his eternal creating of the finite other.¹⁶

One can see in this genealogy of the spirit a link between the subject and the aporetic character of everything, which the subject discloses. In feeling the truth of things, of forms and of motion, the self perforce acknowledges their prevailingly overwhelming reality, which cannot make complete sense. This sense of meaning's surplus is the site of truth. It becomes intensified in the case of the subject herself: she cannot contain herself, even though she cannot escape herself. Likewise, as subject, she is also object, yet this is in such a fashion that, were she empirically or phenomenologically to examine herself, in a detached fashion, this would lead to an absurdity; she would be the active and reflective being who undertakes the examination. As soon as she starts as herself to examine herself, she has transformed her role to become what is being examined, and so loses herself as examining. And yet, there can be no subjective self-gazer without something within herself to behold, nor a conscious and reflective awareness, nor memory of things outside the self. This state of reflexivity, of a looking that is a look, and a look that is a looking, is contradictory, exceeding the bounds of the Principle of Non-Contradiction. But it is a necessary kind of anti-narcissism: there is closure to the point of self-vanishing, the self only being present as an answer to what precedes it, to the reality to which it is a response, and yet with which it coincides, like a mirror which can reflect everything except its own surface.

Yet as Bellantone argues, in this response, depth calls to depth. The extreme conundrum that is the self is able to comprehend other things through its affinity with them: through the circumstance that they also do not contain themselves, and offer their own surplus. All things can be understood as being to a degree mind and as spirit, for this very reason. Indeed, without the signs, open for construal, which all things in nature proffer, one would be lost for primary articulation. Each thing appears to dissolve because its boundary does not belong to it. But the human subject, in the course of the *cogito*, as Descartes discovered, finds in the intensification of this circumstance a strange and unique source of security, because it directly intuits the seemingly impossible. In living through, or living out the disclosure of all things, in an impossible and uncircumscribable inner space, the human subject experiences a direct encounter with its own being which it can take to be a direct encounter with being as such. Understood in such a way, *cogito ergo sum* does not mean solipsism, or a prelude to epistemological certainty, even though Descartes in part took it in such a fashion, but an opening to communion with the manifold, all that is real. The *cogito* means exemplarity and resonance.

To understand Descartes in this way is to read him in terms of Augustine, in contrast to the reverse tendency to reduce Augustine to Descartes.¹⁷ The Latin Church Father intensified the pre-modern turn to the subject, and its links with the aporetic, by construing the self as memory and as time. One's memory, for Augustine, is contained within one, and yet is more than one, extending to memories even of that which has not occurred, and to memories of the eternal which one has lost. To exist in time is to be never-present to oneself, though the past is forever lost, and the future is always to come. So one abides as a subject in melancholic longing which is redeemed by one's hopeful desire for a

¹⁴ *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, pp. 251–53); Nicholas of Cusa, *De Possest* and *De Apice Theoriae*.

¹⁵ *La métaphysique possible* (Bellantone 2012, p. 250).

¹⁶ Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* (Pickstock 2014, pp. 171–92).

¹⁷ Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (Hanby 2003). See for example Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Menn 2010).

recapitulating future. The living out of this Psalmic pattern is truth, an echoing of the eternal. To think is here confessionally to return to the original depths, sought by Aeneas, there to search out the hidden spiritual sun which one can confess without emptiness. One's self, it transpires, is not the narcissistic subject of possessive knowledge, but the presence of the other, and of God within one, as gifts to which one must respond. To live disclosively is to radiate with the truth. But at the end of Augustine's *Confessions*, it seems that it becomes the truth of creatures, each with her own limited life, thoughts, times and modes of praise. It is possible to read Augustine, like Aristotle, somewhat vitalistically and panpsychically.¹⁸

The French tradition of spiritual realism owes much to both Descartes and to French Augustinianism; to Blaise Pascal, Nicolas Malebranche and François Fénelon, amongst others. Descartes established a problematic equilibrium: the material world is real, but so also is the world of spirit.¹⁹ For this reason, the tradition of French philosophy has tended to sidestep the dominant tendency of British thought to reduce mind to sensation and matter, and of German thought to reduce matter to mind and reason. As we have seen, one can read the *cogito* as establishing neither the passivity of spirit before the real, nor its dominance over the real. Rather, it could be situated within the real, at its core, identical with the real, through its act of ontological disclosure. That it is impossible for one to escape one's thinking, does not mean that one is imprisoned behind a barrier of selfhood, but can rather suggest that one knows reality from within. My understanding of myself is in that case a clue to what a leopard or a silver birch tree or a star or an eel may be inside itself: Goethe and others pursued this line of enquiry.

For Descartes himself, this third position is inhibited by his dualism and his counter-Renaissance denial of the fundamental activity and creativity of mind, through which it is seen as passive in the face of reason, in the same way that a disenchanted matter, purged of vital forces, is passive in the face of mechanical force, and the propelling hand of God, the 'continuous creator' of reality. But later exponents of French spiritualism restored these creative Renaissance dimensions.

Maine de Biran recovered the creative *cogito*: there can be no empirical and inductive enquiry into mind, because it is active and alterable.²⁰ It opens upon Being, and constitutes a partially absolute cognitive foundation without mediation for this reason, although Being, after Descartes, is found to overwhelm it as the infinite. The active *cogito* is not solitary, as for Descartes: one is self-aware—as for Johann Gottlieb Fichte—through *effort* and the experience of the resistance of other realities. Such effort involves touch, which grounds the other senses, as we have seen. One cannot sense only oneself. As a consequence, self-awareness involves a relationship with other beings mediated by the *body*, which is itself the site of a fundamental reflexivity, because touch must always be reflexive. The interior resonance of oneself as auto-affection with other realities does not take place without a surface perception of those realities. If one knows everything from within by knowing oneself from within, it is equally the case that one knows oneself from within, through knowing other things from without, from the achieved contact of simultaneity. These ideas were taken up by Merleau-Ponty, but later reversed in favor of an inner/outer dualism by Michel Henry.

Maine de Biran thought that the inner consistencies of things, as well as the patterns of connections between things, were established by *habit*, and not fixed by natural laws or forms. In his dynamization of Aristotle, as described, Ravaisson deepened Biran's contention, especially concerning the notion that habit is the source as much of degradation as of elevation.²¹ How is the same thing, habit, both bad and good, and the source of both badness and goodness? The answer lies in the contrast between a

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* Caroline Hammond tr, Vols I and II [Loeb edition] (Augustine 2014), especially books X, IX and XII.

¹⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. John Cottingham tr (Descartes 1990).

²⁰ Maine de Biran, *The Relationship between the Physical and the Moral in Man*. Darian Meacham and Joseph Spadola tr (De Biran 2016); Ravaisson, 'Contemporary Philosophy', *Selected Essays* (Ravaisson 2016b, pp. 59–83); *La Philosophie en France au XIXe Siècle* (Ravaisson 1867).

²¹ Ravaisson, 'Of Habit', *Selected Essays* (Ravaisson 2016a, pp. 31–58).

mechanical, fixed and inflexible imitation or repetition, which is passive, and an active flexible and creative non-identical repetition, which, in shaping something original, also shapes something more secure and substantive. In this respect, spirit is revealed, beyond Descartes, as creative.

Ravaissou thus defined the pre-given, inert, fixed and material sphere as the core of evil. Nothing real precedes motion, activity and habit. Yet a habit must be established. So how could it have been established from the outset, without being always already there? Similarly, if what is fundamental for the human spirit, and for all realities, is action, so rendering desire more ontologically fundamental than given form, whence does desire arise, if what is desired exceeds what is already found? In both cases, Ravaissou's answer is theological: it is grace.²² Through grace, habits are established in excess of their formation; and through grace, action and desire exceed intelligence. Grace is not merely inward and elusive, but external and manifest. For the lure of beauty in nature is realized as the 'serpentine lines' of art, undulations whose unpredictable excess over geometry lends it charm, but whose mystery depends upon their indication of a hidden but fundamental *undrawn* line in every artefaction.²³ The supernatural grace of art, as of all human action, consists in this double enthrallment of visible path and hidden secret hollow-ways which ensure that beauty remains the unmanifest within the manifest, including in the instance of its performance. The mystery of habit is not a truth beyond habit, but a visible intensification of its mystery.

In this way, Ravaissou provided an unprecedented ontology of grace, somewhat indebted to Schelling. Nature is not self-sufficient, because it is nature; and is always moving. There is no truth of nature, by itself. For truth to arrive, nature must always be supplemented by grace. The integration of nature and grace in Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, through Maurice Blondel, influenced by Ravaissou, stands at least in part genealogically within this lineage.

It could be said that Ravaissou's pupil, Henri Bergson, added to and subtracted from his teacher's vision, of a Catholic vitalism, secured by transcendence rather than immanence.²⁴ He underlined that one's self-presence is as creative being, paradoxically receptive at the heart of one's activity. As for Augustine, one's inner being is at one with memory and time. At the core of experience, and one's self-experience, one does not perceive discretely separated quantities in combination, but 'qualitative multiplicities' which 'reciprocally penetrate' one another. Past, present and future are not known, except in terms of their inter-involvement, and the present is not something like the 'past so far', and 'all complete' (*tout fait*), but is creatively unfinished, because it is pregnant with the future, and still haunted by the past, which continues to resonate through it. The fundamental elements of one's awareness do not conform to the Principle of Non-Contradiction, nor to tidy sets or clusters; they are more akin to fuzzy sets, which keep breaking bounds and permeating each other.²⁵

Far from supposing that the default state of one's feelings is a psychological somnolence or continuum of torpor, Bergson suggested that it is such 'primitive' sensation, rather than the finished concept, which offers truth. One's finished concepts, rather like fixed and repeatable experiments in science, may take snapshots of dynamic processes, akin to cinematographical stills, within the dark cinematic cave.²⁶ The latter are not more real or more true than the continuous motions which one sees on film. It is the smooth continuous movement which is intended by the film-maker, and this realizes the logic of the infinitesimal series of the stills. Likewise, in nature, as for Aristotle, motion is one continuous gesture. Were it not for this, it would be quite stuck, and Achilles would not overtake the tortoise, even though this gesture is aporetic, and involves an impossible coincidence of potency

²² Ravaissou, 'Of Habit' (Ravaissou 2016a, p. 61), 'Metaphysics and Morals', p. 293. John Milbank, 'The Mystery of Reason', *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism*. Peter M. Candler Jr and Conor Cunningham eds. (Milbank 2010, pp. 68–117).

²³ Ravaissou, 'The Art of Drawing According to Leonardo da Vinci'; 'On the Teaching of Drawing'; 'The Venus de Milo'; 'Greek Funerary Monuments', *Selected Essays*, pp. 145–242.

²⁴ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* Arthur Mitchell tr (Bergson 1998).

²⁵ Michel Serres introduces this mathematical consideration to his Bergsonian outlook in *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*.

²⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Bergson 1998, pp. 272–370).

with act. It is the equally aporetic raw feeling of intermingling qualities within one, as the passage of time, which resonates with truth, beyond the grasp of reason, with the dynamic and creative activity of nature herself. Science can know with exactitude the punctiliar successions of regularity within nature, but cannot know her spontaneous processes which produce the new; as we now know, at the quantum level, but also in terms of life, animality and intelligence.²⁷

As Bellantone underlines, there are known instances of causes in excess of their effects, causes from which effects ‘read’ and make their selection. There are also instances of effects in excess of their cause. Causation is somewhat akin to the Aristotelian combination of efficiency with form and formality, or the Neoplatonic process of emanation or of becoming, according to which things transform in such a way as to exceed themselves. The mechanical propulsion of one thing by another is by comparison a local fiction, for Bellantone following Hume, contrived by a deceiving habit to encourage one to suppose one understands a constant conjunction.

For Bergson, however, habit was always seen in negative terms, as contrasting with creativity. He did not, like his teacher, imagine a reverse construal, whereby creativity might itself be fruitfully shaped by habit, an economy one might describe in terms of non-identical repetition. Nonetheless, it was for him specifically the creative arts, and not the sciences, through which the most profound processes at work in nature could be intuited. This intuition arose by a remote edging towards an end, or reaching for a receding horizon, which is not pre-given, in the same way that the artist does not command what she is aiming at. This conception would seem to acknowledge a disclosive lure of transcendence, for Bergson, as indeed his later work confirms, in contrast to Deleuze’s interpretation of him, which, in immanentist terms, allows a teleological priority of the future to be shaped by a Stoic fatality of an eternal past.²⁸

The de-prioritization of good habit and its aporia suggest that for Bergson there is less basis for a construal of the lure of desire by grace, as envisaged by Ravaisson. In the latter’s terms, a relative fixity of form by matter and embodiment might not be exhausted by an assumption of its impeding potential, as confined by an illusory spatialized completeness, but might rather precipitate a creative potency. One instance of creative confinement which stems pure organic flux is ‘artifice’ within nature, such as when disparate things and species negotiate between themselves a distribution within non-organic space, as pertains between trees and birds, resulting in nests. Here, creativity avails itself of the detour of the use of tools and signs, though Bergson indeed recognizes that one knows oneself by turning back upon oneself the use of symbolic indicators.²⁹ He nonetheless reduces primal and initial sign and tool to pragmatic convenience, not seeming to concede that this is part of one’s qualitative gratuity, as expressed within and beyond the mind. It is for this reason also that he builds a duality between the apparently blind instinct of insects, and the calculating character of the dominant human primitive intelligence, even though he regards human reflective intuition as a synthesis of the two poles. It is unclear what definite warrant there could be for this reduction of collective insect artifice to instinct, nor for a human primacy of technology over art. For this reason, one could suggest that Aristotle’s generic hierarchy in nature may remain more sensitive to the appearance of things than Bergson’s dialectics of diverging paths of maximum development as between plant, insect and human animal, eventually to be re-united. It may be more plausible after Aristotle to claim that the animal preserves but extends the self-containment and motility of the plant, while the human mind expands both the instinctive and the conceptual organizing powers of the lower animal species.

The Biranian sense of co-subjective and relational emergence as crucial to one’s experience of time seems also to have been lost from view in Bergson’s approach. The shared simultaneity of perception, which, as he indeed realizes ensures that there is one time, and that it is irreversible, in his arguments

²⁷ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Meaning* (Barad 2007).

²⁸ For Bergson’s final religious and philosophical position, see A. D. Sertillanges, *Avec Henri Bergson* (Sertillanges 1941).

²⁹ *Creative Evolution* (Bergson 1998, pp. 302–14).

against Einsteinian relativity (that are still shared by some quantum physicists),³⁰ belongs to one's original sense of the temporal which does not exist outside language or machine clock-recording.

One could see such an approach as a means by which to overcome the Bergsonian duality between spirit and matter, time and space. Motion may be one single gesture, and yet, as for Gabriel Tarde, one can also fractalize it into infinitesimally receding atomic units; within such units of the motion of gravity, gravity is still at work.³¹ But this would not necessitate a monadic reduction, nor a reduction to the arbitrary dominance of one monad over another, through the work of despotic micro-magnets, as Tarde suggests. Indeed, his insight compounds the aporia that holds between the atomic and the holistic. In the same way that motion, and the thought that is intensified motion, combines the opposites of act and potency, so they combine the opposites of a perfect single continuum, and an endless fractalization into yet further components. The presence of the whole movement in each of the parts, as Tarde noted, is a sign of the reality of this contradiction. In the same terms, one can see that the spatially articulated ticking of the clock, while not comprehending the inner duration of unity in flux of time, as known to the soul, is nonetheless crucial to the soul's apprehension of time.³² The qualitative and quantitative, interior and exterior, atomic, dynamic and spatial aspects of time hold together.³³

For this reason, one's artistic manifestation of the truth, as thinking and as spirit, is a matter of linguistic, musical and material expression, undertaken in common. It is both a cultural and a liturgical expression, as we have already seen; theoretical because performed holistically, and *vice versa*.

In order to theorize truth without melancholy, it would seem that one needs to stop thinking in terms of trying to bridge the barrier between subject and object, between knower and thing. The mark of realism is not that truth holds without the knowing subject, nor that it holds in terms of that subject. Rather, that that which one can feel and creatively advance, rather than abstractly comprehend, encounters truth outside itself, and in terms of degrees of spirit. This is a matter of self-constitution, because and not despite of aporetic irresolution.

One observes Hegel's gesture, based upon a framework in which temporal becoming was seen as the coincidence of Being with nothingness, as resulting in a residue of arid facts dominated by an arbitrary will that has 'returned' to its own self-identical willing at the 'end of history'. But for the tradition we have considered, somewhat culminating in Bergson, the ultimately analytic logic *in extremis* of identifying Being with Nothingness is not entertained. An interplay of yes and no is that in which analytic logic consists. To see Being as nothing, because it is nothing specific, in the spirit of dialectical logic, is to stay *within* the sway of the analytic logic of identity and the Principle of Non-Contradiction, overlooking the possibility that Being might entail a positive but para-consistent plenitude, which one can feel and creatively advance in a disposition of hopefulness, rather than abstractly comprehend yet remain in melancholy. For this outlook, if, for example, each thing or subject is simultaneously inside and outside itself, this does not mean that 'is' is identical with 'is not' in general, as for Hegel, but rather, that their coincidence in this specific instance reveals a more fundamental coincidence specifically of the bounding and the bounded that somehow positively secures the ineffable concrete reality of each specific thing.

For Bergson, as for Plato of the *Sophist*, negation is difference, a shadow of one thing not being another. To ossify this shadow as an essence is to be the victim of a phantom; it is hastily to conflate unknown mystery with an exhausted emptiness. There is no nullity, but for that reason, there is no mere logical interplay of yes and no which one can harness in order to negotiate the paradoxes of reality, where every step one takes seems to tread on a new filament of contradiction, and yet one

³⁰ Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity: Bergson and the Einsteinian Universe*. Mark Lewis and Robin Durie tr (Bergson 1999); Lee Smolin, *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* (Smolin 2014).

³¹ Gabriel Tarde, *Monadology and Sociology*. Theo Lorenc tr (Tarde 2012).

³² On this point, see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time I: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stiegler 1998).

³³ For Michel Serres, Bergsonian duration can be construed as being inter-personal, and as the molding and remolding of space. See *Rome*.

keeps walking. The constant coincidences of one thing with another, despite their mutual exclusion, sustain a really-experienced identity of inside and outside, of potential with activity in motion, of past with present and future, of self with other, and of self-containment with self-loss.

For this reason, where some have tended to deny the reality of the real because it might not conform to logic, others have sought to force reality into the bounds of comprehensible logic, securing a mutual echoing of subject and object. But this echo-chamber is narcissism and melancholy. We have seen that one can alternatively consider the implications not of the epistemological, but of the metaphysical turn to the subject, which, from Socrates onwards, has brought variously together logic and the extra-logical truth of reality, the truth of creativity, of natural process, of time and of hope. This truth is realized in, and manifest as spirit, the process of human thinking. If this process is one of increasing manifestation, of a teleological lure of desire and hope under grace, might it be understood as participatory conforming to the eternal?

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